Interview with Edward W. Clark

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

EDWARD W. CLARK

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is April 29, 1992. This is an interview with Edward W. Clark for the Association for Diplomatic Studies Oral History Program. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. To begin I wonder if you would give me a little about your background? When and where you grew up and were educated.

CLARK: Well, I was born in New York and grew up in New Jersey. I went to school at the Peddie School in Hightstown, New Jersey and then went to Princeton. I graduated from Princeton in 1939 and then went to Cornell Law School. In 1941 I finished my first year there and realized that I was not going to be able to finish so decided to do something else. I finally ended up in the job as a diplomatic courier in the US State Department.

Q: That was when?

CLARK: In June 1941

Q: How did that come about?

CLARK: I had applied to the Naval Air Corps training program and had just taken a certain test in that regard. I was waiting to hear from them. I had a younger brother at

Princeton and drove down during Easter vacation to pick him up and bring him back home to Ridgewood, New Jersey. I spent the night there and we went out with two of my former professors in the history department. During the evening everybody was discussing the same subject...what was going to happen in the war that was about to come and what everybody was going to do. Well my younger brother was in ROTC so he knew what he was going to do. He was going to graduate and then go into the Army.

One of the professors had applied to the Air Force for a commission and the other one had decided that he was going to go into the Marine Corps. The second one of these professors also headed up the student employment bureau at Princeton and when it came to my turn I told them that I had already applied to the Naval Air Corps training program.

This chap said, “You know an interesting letter came across my desk today from the State Department. They are looking for two couriers, two graduates, who they want to hire as couriers because they are starting a courier service in Latin America.” I said, “Tell me more about that,” which he did. It was of great interest to me.

Q: Had you had any Spanish?

CLARK: Some. I said, “How do you apply for this?” He said, “Well, I can send you an application form up at Ithaca if you want it.” I said, “Fine. Do so.” So I got it, filled it out and was then asked to come to Princeton for an interview with the then head of personnel of the Department of State. Then, of course, I didn't hear anything more.

So when I graduated in June I had the Navy, which had just informed me that I was accepted and the State Department, from which I hadn't heard. So I sent a wire to the State Department and explained the situation and asked to be advised because if I was not being considered I was going to go into the Naval program. I got a telegram back signed by Secretary of State Cordell Hull asking me to come to Washington right away for a further interview.

I came to Washington and was interviewed by the Assistant Secretary of State for an hour. Then I was sent back to the head of personnel who told me to go have a physical exam. I had the exam and was hired on the spot. Two weeks later I was off to Panama on a ship.

Q: Tell me a bit about both war time and being a courier in those days. This is something that is not picked up in our record. You are unique in this.

CLARK: The reason for the courier service was just that...the war. The need for better communication between posts and Washington of a classified nature was the reason it was started. When I got to Panama in July, 1941 we were not in the war yet, not for another six months. But they were already getting ready. There were Service people all over the place. As far as we were concerned we had German, Italian and British couriers all doing the same thing. Sometimes we were on the same planes. We got to know the British, but we didn't have much to do with the Italians and the Germans, if anything.

We had regular schedules and were on the road all the time.

Q: Were you armed?

CLARK: No. No arms. The myth about having your pouch chained to your wrist is a myth. Sometimes we had large amounts in which case we would have to have another seat. That didn't happen too often until later when we got into the war. Then the Navy assigned Naval attach#s all over Latin America and they began to send big stuff. Code machines, private mail...we used to get 400 pounds of private mail which made a problem as we couldn't handle it personally.

At some point along the way it was realized that this wasn't working and it wasn't classified material so we arranged with the Navy that we would check the unclassified portion as regular baggage and just handle the classified stuff in the plane itself.

There were no particular incidents of a serious nature. It became rather routine after everybody got used to meeting us and taking us back to the Embassy. We would have to check the pouches at night and get up at 4:00 in the morning and somebody would have to come to the code room and give you your mail and then off you would go to the airport and on. But there were no serious incidents.

Q: You stayed on the Latin America circuit?

CLARK: Well, I was on the Latin America circuit from 1941 until beginning of 1944. Then I went to Madrid where we started a courier service to North Africa and within Spain. I was there for six months. Then in September in 1945 when Paris was liberated, I was assigned from Madrid to Paris to open up a courier service there. I guess I was about the third person to arrive at the Embassy in Paris after liberation. Working out of Paris I got to Brussels, Luxembourg...I opened up a courier service to Switzerland. I was the first American into Switzerland after four years of it being sealed off.

Q: How had information gotten to us? Alan Dulles had been working hard there. How did we work out of Switzerland without couriers?

CLARK: You would have to ask Alan Dulles that but I suppose there were people who got in and out, but it would have been done illegally. I was there legally. The border had just opened. I had my diplomatic passport and courier letters and they let me through. I brought three people back with me who had been in the Embassy in Paris before and who we wanted back in their old jobs as the Embassy was just opening again.

Then in 1944 we had the Battle of the Bulge and the military kind of panicked. They revoked our military status designations and brought us all back into the various Services. This would include many young Foreign Service officers throughout the world as well as the couriers. I actually entered the Navy in March, 1945. A few days before I was about to be sent to China...I was an Ensign in the Navy...I had gone to Harvard Business

School...Just a few days before I was to step on a plane to go to China the bomb was dropped and everything was canceled.

I ended up in Hawaii. With the war over the State Department got all of us back. I had taken the Foreign Service exams while up at Harvard and I entered the Foreign Service.

Q: Let's go back to Madrid. You were there and it was very much under Franco and it was war time conditions. What was life in Madrid from your perspective like at that time?

CLARK: Everybody felt the hard hand of Franco. That was, of course, very depressing. On the other hand he didn't bother, really, very much with any of the diplomats that were there. We were allowed to move about, were not harassed except perhaps occasionally concerning our passports. The conditions, of course, in Spain were very, very poor because of the civil war having just been finished a short time before. For all of the diplomatic personnel it was not hard living. We were not molested. If you had money you could get food.

Q: It was a neutral capital but there had been a certain affinity between Hitler and Franco, was there any concern about spies intercepting couriers, etc.?

CLARK: Oh, yes. But that didn't really involve us. We were carriers of mail. But there was certainly that atmosphere. Everybody was in there trying to get intelligence and thwart other people's intelligence. The same thing was going on in Lisbon. One of our main jobs as couriers there was to carry the kind of messages that needed to be carried to take care of the problem of US Air Force people who were shot down in Europe and made their way across the Pyrenees into northern Spain. There were a lot of them. Our consuls up in Bilbao and in the north were always being involved in that and having to notify our people in Madrid. I am sure there was a lot of paper work to get them out. So an internal courier service was very important at that time.

Q: How about the Spanish authorities?

CLARK: They were quite cooperative. Again they were in the middle. They may have sympathized with the Axis powers...no doubt Franco did. But the war wasn't over.

Q: Franco obviously didn't want to get dragged into the war despite Hitler's earlier attempts.

CLARK: He certainly didn't want to get into the war after we invaded North Africa and it looked like we had won.

Q: You went to Panama in 1946 and served three years there. What were you doing?

CLARK: My first job there was as passport officer. We had three officers in the consular section...an officer in charge, one for visas and one for passports. I did that for about six months. Then I did a short stint in the visa section. There was then a big turnover of some kind and within a year I ended up in charge of the consular section which was a pretty big job for one of my inexperience.

Q: Did Panama have a fairly large refugee population trying to get to the United States? I am thinking of people who got stranded there from Europe and other places.

CLARK: No, that was not a big problem there. The main problem in the passport section was taking care of passports because there was a large American community in the Canal Zone who had to get renewals, or first-time passports, register children who were born there, etc. That was the main thing in the passport section. In the visa section it was mainly Panamanian, although there were a few refugees of various kinds from the war who would drift in. But that wasn't a major problem. There were a lot of protection cases there.

Q: What were the Americans who lived in the Canal Zone like? Could you characterize them at this particular time?

CLARK: Like any place. You had the good and bad. There was such a clash of cultures there between the Americans in the Canal Zone and the Panamanians. The standard of living was so different; the values were so different. It was just normal that there would be resentment. They had two different scales of pay...the gold standard and the silver standard. Also racially there were problems. Many Americans were from the South which made the problem of race more difficult. Quite frankly there were many people in the Canal Zone that I came to know very well and liked. But as a group they wanted their privileges and would fight for it.

Q: Also it was not a period of time when one was trying to be culturally aware and operate in a less high handed fashion.

CLARK: There was no pressure to do that. After all, the official situation was the gold standard and the silver standard. White people only in the gold bathroom and others in the silver bathroom and facilities. They got paid on different wage schedules. That was all official. I have seen some ugly scenes there, very embarrassing. But I have seen some in Washington, too, when I came in 1941. I will never forget that the first evening I was in Washington I got on a bus and all of a sudden the bus driver said, “Get back in the bus you black son of a bitch.” I saw this scene duplicated many times in the Canal Zone. Same thing.

Q: How did the Embassy relate to the Panamanian government? Was the relationship a little colonial?

CLARK: I wouldn't say so. On the contrary. You had the colonial attitude in the Canal Zone. The Embassy was always trying to cope with that situation vis-a-vis the Panamanian government. The government would make their complaints through us. We would then have to see what we could do with the Canal Zone authorities to smooth things over. So, I think on the contrary the Embassy's job was to try to keep irritations to a minimum.

At that time, of course, we had a major problem with the bases that we had constructed all through the Republic of Panama during the war. We were renegotiating that agreement and it went on for a long time. It came to a head in 1948. The Panamanian national assembly rejected the agreement. We were asking to retain a number of bases. Secretary of State Marshall had warned them that if this did happen we would withdraw, which they didn't believe. But it was a very, very heated debate and a very critical time in our relationship. Within 48 hours we got everybody out of Panama...not the Canal Zone. We must have had 20 bases in Panama.

Q: Which, of course, was a major source of work and income for the economy, etc.

CLARK: It certainly was, but nationalism was at its peak and they didn't think we would carry out our threat. Unfortunately, the military had already reached the conclusion we didn't need them but didn't say it. So our relations suffered a severe setback for no good reason.

Q: So we were fighting over an issue that really wasn't of major concern for us.

CLARK: Right, we had already made the decision to phase out the bases. We were just forced to phase them out fast under pressure.

Q: Did this result in any incidents against the Embassy?

CLARK: No, I don't think so. I certainly didn't feel any of this and I lived in the center of town almost across the street from the National Palace. It wasn't personal then, it became so later on when things got difficult over the Canal Treaties.

Q: You then left in 1949 and went to the Department where you served from 1949-53. What were you doing in the Department?

CLARK: I was Desk Officer for El Salvador and Guatemala.

Q: This was still during the Truman Administration. What were our relations with El Salvador and Guatemala in those days?

CLARK: They were very good with El Salvador. Everything was quiet there. The military controlled the situation there with the oligarchy. They had already had their hoedown with the peasants in 1932 when they shot 30,000 of them, or something like that. There was no problems between us and El Salvador, but with Guatemala we had major problems.

Q: What was going on in Guatemala in this period?

CLARK: Well, in Guatemala you just had an overthrow of a long time dictator named Jorge Ubico who had kept the wraps on the situation there. Then you had an election and a fellow by the name of Juan Jos Arevalo became president. He was a very liberal minded fellow. Of course, anybody at that time began to be considered, thought of, or maybe was a communist. But I don't think he was. But he certainly introduced a lot of progressive reforms there benefitting the people, but often hurting the United Fruit Company, which was the big American interest there.

After him another election was held and the major perspective winner was going to be a Colonel Arana. He probably would have been a good president. He also was a center of the road fellow who was highly regarded in Guatemala. However, it was arranged that he be assassinated, and he was.

Q: When you say it was arranged that he be assassinated...?

CLARK: Well, who knows exactly who did it. But I think it was a group in the military itself who wanted Colonel Arbenz to be president. He was a much more leftist thinking individual than Arana was and probably even than Arevalo was. The election took place and he was elected. What he did was allow the Arevalo program to go farther and farther. He was very much in favor of the liberalization of the labor laws, which again hurt the United Fruit Company right away. He encouraged the importation of arms from Czechoslovakia. We

didn't like that. In general he took a very, very liberal path and soon he was being called a communist in the eyes of the Americans, the United Fruit Company in particular.

I cannot say that he wasn't a communist. When it was all over he took refuge in Cuba. But there is a body of thinking that he wasn't actually a communist. I am inclined to think that myself. In any event he was a communist for the United Fruit Company and they were not only lobbying in the State Department but were up on the Hill. They wanted him out because he was affecting their interests very severely.

Q: How did you feel as the desk officer? The desk officer at this period of time didn't have the layering that you have now so that the desk officer had much more influence than later on when you had directors, deputy assistant secretaries, etc.

CLARK: You worked directly with the Assistant Secretary in those days.

Q: How did the influence of the United Fruit Company work? We are talking about the '49-'53 period.

CLARK: Well there wasn't any question about the fact that they were hurting the United Fruit Company and there wasn't any question that some of the things that were being done down there were, even if not communist inspired, off the wall and the United Fruit Company was going to be driven out of there one way or another. So, certainly you had to be sympathetic to their problem. They were getting screwed.

So what to do? You make your representations telling them that it was going to affect our relations very severely, and it did. Things were very ticklish and confrontational between the United States and Guatemala in those days. The Guatemalan Ambassador at that time was an archeologist, a very sensitive individual who had been educated at the University of Chicago and married to an American woman. He had to support all of these hard-nosed allegations against the United States and it drove him to suicide. He shot himself. So things were really very tense, very bad. They were still bad when I left.

Q: Did we have much control...obviously we are talking about something that happened after you left when there was basically a CIA-sponsored overthrow of the Arbenz regime, but that was during the Eisenhower Administration. Did we have any levers to pull in Guatemala?

CLARK: No, there was no AID program in Guatemala in those days. They had us, the United Fruit, as hostage. The only leverage...there wasn't any real leverage other than the threat of possible intervention which always hung over the area.

Q: But we hadn't done that sort of thing either...

CLARK: No, this was the first time there had been anything like a possible or real communist government in our hemisphere. And that was pretty upsetting at that time.

Q: Cuba didn't really happen until 1959 or so.

CLARK: And it was very real regardless whether Arbenz was a communist or not, and it was very shocking to us at that time. After all you had Senator McCarthy and all we "communists" in the State Department.

Q: I want to talk about that. Who was the Assistant Secretary for Latin America Affairs during this time?

CLARK: Eddie Miller.

Q: What was the attitude? This was of obvious major concern at this period of time. What was the attitude from these men when you would bring up more bad news, etc.?

CLARK: They were, of course, concerned. You have to go back to that time when McCarthyism and communism was at its height and here we had communism right in our back yard.

Q: Let's talk about McCarthyism both at large, as far as you felt it, but also on this particular job.

CLARK: McCarthy never entered the Guatemalan situation to my knowledge. He directed his attack against people and the institution of the State Department. But this was a prime example for anybody who believed in McCarthyism. Here is this commie government and what are you doing about it? Well, what could you do? What we could do was what we did finally.

It wasn't a very comfortable job to be in at the time, believe me. You know one day a gentleman came into my office. He was an accountant and had just come back from Guatemala. He said, “I have something I am very worried about and not sure what to do about it, but I thought maybe this was the right place to start.” I said, “What is the problem?” He said, “Well, I have been an accountant for the railroad in Guatemala.” The railroad was built by American investment and 51% owned by the United Fruit Company and 49% by other investors. He said, “I have worked now five or six years there and the United Fruit Company has been taking advantage of the Guatemalans and taking advantage of their 51% ownership...giving themselves deductions on the railroad. This, of course, is hurting the other investors.” I said, “Don't tell me this. It is the last thing that I need.” He said, “Well, it is true and I have to do something about it. I think I will go to the investors and explain exactly what has been happening.” I said, “Do you really want to do this now?” He said, “Yes, in all conscience I do.”

Well, he did. They filed a court case up in Jersey City. They got a judgment against the United Fruit Company which was published in all of the Guatemalan papers. It was just what the Guatemalans had said the United Fruit Company was doing in Guatemala. The company had to pay retribution to the other investors. All this right out in the open. So where were you trying to defend the Fruit Company when they were robbing our own investors. This was a further complication to the problem.

Q: Just what a desk officer does not want in the middle of a crisis. It is the dilemma one often has, even as a consular officer, when you are trying to defend the American who has gotten into trouble because they didn't do the right thing.

CLARK: What we finally did was to intervene. I had left by that time and was unaware that they had already started the plan.

Q: Then you got yourself out of Central America for a while and went to Asmara from 1953-56. What were you doing there?

CLARK: I was consul there.

Q: What was the situation at that time in Eritrea?

CLARK: Eritrea had just been federated with the Empire of Ethiopia by the United Nations. The British had just left. It was then turned over to a local Eritrean government but federated with the Ethiopian Empire. The Ethiopians had customs, immigration, defense and foreign affairs. The other things like garbage collection and local police and fire departments were part of the Eritrean government responsibility.

Q: How did the Eritreans feel about this situation at that time?

CLARK: One of my jobs was to keep track of how this federation was proceeding, whether it was being respected by the Ethiopians. The Eritreans and the Ethiopians had always been at odds. The Ethiopians over the centuries would every once in a while come down and beat up on the Eritreans and take back a bunch of their wives and make them pay them tribute and then they would go back. This went on for centuries. They didn't like each other. And the Eritreans had obviously good reasons for not liking the Ethiopians.

The Italians, of course, had been in Eritrea for some 40-50 years. They had a great influence on the Eritreans. They built a lot of roads, good schools. The Eritreans in many ways were better off and better educated than the Ethiopians.

It was obvious to everybody, I think, including the United Nations that this was not going to last. This was just the papering over of a problem in order to let the United Nations get out of there.

So the three years I was there you could see the gradual diminishing of this structure. The Ethiopians were gradual about it but obviously they were going to... Well we reported that but there wasn't much we could do. Our big interest there was the American military.

Q: Kagnew Station. Had Kagnew been established by that time?

CLARK: Kagnew Station was originally an Italian naval communications center. When the British took over from the Italians in 1942, they gave us that naval station, and we used it as a naval station at first. Then it expanded pretty quickly and was used as a station that could monitor nuclear explosions in the Soviet Union plus, because of its location, it was a good relay station for the military system across the world.

So by the time I got there, about 11 years later, it was a substantial station run by the Army with a smaller naval communications unit.

It was our major interest and our major problem because there were some 2,000 people there and they were getting into trouble. We had the usual PXs there and people would buy there and sell outside and the merchants would complain, etc.

They had the need for expansion and during the time I was there, there was negotiated a new agreement which provided for a new facility to house all the stations plus some receiving and sending antenna fields. Interestingly that was all negotiated in Asmara instead of Ethiopia, so that we, the American consul and the Commander of the post there

were very, very much involved in the negotiations. It was very interesting. I know of no other time when an agreement like that was negotiated.

Q: With whom were you negotiating with?

CLARK: We were negotiating with the local Ethiopian Federal Government. The Emperor's representative there in Asmara. The details were all worked out over a period of a year. When that was finally agreed to then we all went up to Addis and with the Ethiopian Government and the Embassy finally signed the agreement.

Q: The Ambassador in Addis Ababa was Joseph Simonson who was not a career officer. How did he operate?

CLARK: He was a minister of the church in Minneapolis and a Republican supporter. I think he had said the prayers at several Republican conventions. He really didn't know what he was doing.

Q: That was probably one reason why the negotiations were held at Asmara.

CLARK: No, I think it was because the details couldn't have been negotiated without being in Asmara and actually going out to the sites, etc.

He was not involved in it. He was unfortunate. Remember Nixon made a trip around Africa as Vice President?

Q: Yes, I interviewed somebody not long ago who accompanied him on that trip, Jules Walker.

CLARK: When Nixon came back from that he said that there was one meatball ambassador that has to go, and that was Simonson as it turned out. A terrible thing to say but...

Q: But from what I gather he wasn't doing anything.

CLARK: No, he was unfortunate. He was a nice guy but shouldn't have been in that position. There are lots of other ambassadors I know, political and otherwise, who shouldn't have been there either.

Q: Did this affect your work at all or was he over the hill and far away?

CLARK: We were able to report directly to Washington. I would send copies to the Embassy but they didn't have to go to the Embassy. So we were fairly independent. We handled all their mail for them because it came in through the APO. The military would turn it over to us and we would put the Embassy mail on the local Ethiopian airline planes. They were always calling us asking for their mail. At one point they accused us of holding it up, if you can imagine that, for Christmas.

Q: What was the impression you were getting from those in Eritrea of Haile Selassie in those days?

CLARK: The Eritrean people didn't like the Ethiopians so they didn't like the Emperor. He came there several times while I was there. They had a big reception up at the Emperor's representative's palace. But he didn't spend much time down there. But no, Eritrean people didn't like the Ethiopians, period. And they still don't.

Q: Now they are at least quasi independent, but I am not sure...Were there any other nationalities there that had any influence in that area?

CLARK: The Italians did. The Ethiopian policy towards the Italians was very well thought out. They advised their people to treat them properly. They wanted them to stay because they were the ones who could build the roads, fix the electricity, do all the things that the Ethiopians didn't know how to do to keep things going. So there was a substantial populous of Italians of that level there. Plus some fairly well-to-do Italians. They had the

beer plant there, a textile plant, they had a large dairy producing farm and a number of other things. So the Italians were very much in the ballpark there, very influential. I would say that the Italian Consul General was much more influential than any of us were at the time. Apart from that, no...

Q: No Soviet representation?

CLARK: No, no Soviets.

Q: Israeli?

CLARK: Well, the Israelis had a kosher meat packing plant there. Eritrea became a central place for produce for ARAMCO. They had an agent there who bought and they would send a plane over once or twice a week to take fresh produce back.

Q: I was in Dhahran from 1958-60 and I ate that food.

CLARK: They used to come over and take their R&R there too. Did you ever do that?

Q: No, I never got over. Well then you left Eritrea and came back and had about a year's stint in Personnel in the Department?

CLARK: Yes, in Performance and Evaluation. We saw to it that all the efficiency reports were written and filed on time and in the files for the Promotion Board Meetings. We reviewed the records of officers who wanted to know what was in their record.

Q: What was your impression of how the system was working at that time—basically the promotion system?

CLARK: I thought it was as good as anything you could probably devise. One of the things that changed just about this time was the opening up of the files and requiring the writer to show or discuss it with the officer being rated. That was new just about the time I got there.

Q: Before that you couldn't see your record until you got back to Washington.

CLARK: Even then you were restricted.

Q: There were a lot of things that might be in there that might have been very candid but also might not have been correct.

CLARK: That is quite true and is the reason that they went to this new policy. Of course, it developed that lots of reports didn't reflect some of the adverse characteristics of the officer being rated. The rater didn't want to have conflicts with someone who was working for him. So then you began to get...

Q: Everyone became wonderful at a very bland level and it was very difficult to sort out things. You left that after about a year and from 1957-59 you moved to something else in the Department. What was that?

CLARK: Yes, I was assigned to the Office of Congressional Relations.

Q: This was towards the end of the Eisenhower Administration. Who was in charge of that and how did it work?

CLARK: Bill Macomber was the Assistant Secretary.

Q: He had been an aide to a Congressman or Senator, hadn't he?

CLARK: Yes. He had been aide to Senator Sherman Cooper. When Dulles came in as Secretary of State, he was brought in as Special Assistant and later became Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations.

Q: How did you find working for Bill Macomber? He had a temper that was renown throughout the Service.

CLARK: Well, he was a very difficult fellow to work for. He was a workaholic, a bachelor and temperamental as could be. He was fundamentally a nice person, but his personality made it very difficult.

I managed all right because the first time he lost his temper with me I called him on it. I said, “Don't ever talk to me like that again.” He respected that and he seldom lost his temper with me from then on. He was demanding, tough. There are so many stories about him.

Q: Okay, tell one or two just to give a little flavor.

CLARK: I will tell you one about Dick Rubottom and Macomber.

Q: Rubottom was Assistant Secretary for Latin America Affairs.

CLARK: He was up on the Hill testifying and something happened there which angered him immensely. He came back to the Department and went right into Macomber and said, “You, get in the elevator we are going right up to see the Secretary and have it out!” And they had it out with the Secretary. Bill Snow did the same thing. He came into Macomber's office and said, “Listen, you so and so, if you ever do that again.....”

In a way Macomber was a bully. But yet he had a nice side to him that I got to know and like. If he wasn't under all this pressure he could be a very decent person with a good sense of humor and all that.

Q: Did he get married while you were there?

CLARK: He got married while I was in Argentina to Phyllis, Mr. Dulles' secretary, and I heard about it and wrote him a letter congratulating him. I got a seven page letter back written while on his honeymoon in Geneva. To this day I think it amazing.

Q: In Congressional Relations one of the great complaints has always been that the State Department doesn't know how to play Congress. One because there is no constituency but also Foreign Service people as a whole tend to not be sensitive to the needs of Congress on foreign relations things. They feel Congress is meddling and show it. Did you find it was an uphill battle to get the State Department to respond to Congress?

CLARK: In my job did I go to the Assistant Secretary for Latin America and say that he was not working on this guy the right way?

Q: Or any request. Did you notice this?

CLARK: No. I think everybody tried hard, really. There was a certain attitude that it was none of their damn business and I have a lot of things on my mind and have to answer this idiot. But by and large in my experience they tried their best to give the Congressman or Senator the information he wanted. Macomber would be the first to say they don't respond. I think you can carry it too far the other way...drop everything and take care of the Congress. But my experience is no, when something came in they went to work on it and tried their best to take care of the guy.

Q: Then you had a hiatus from 1959-60 when you went to the war college. Which war college did you go to?

CLARK: The National War College.

Q: How did you find the mix between the Foreign Service and the military?

CLARK: Oh, excellent. That is a wonderful thing. It was very useful to me in my assignments afterwards.

Q: Particularly I suppose when you dealt with Panama again. The military was key. Did you find being a War College graduate that you could drop this out very quickly in dealing with the military?

CLARK: Yes, they accepted you as a human being rather than some kind of a cooky-pusher. It is a fraternity and a very, very useful thing that happens there. And you get to understand the military's point of view, which is very important. And they yours.

Q: Then you did go back to Panama again from 1960-63. What were you doing there?

CLARK: I was political officer first and then I was acting Deputy Chief of Mission.

Q: What was the situation in 1960-63?

CLARK: It was bad.

Q: Cuba had boiled over by that time.

CLARK: Yeah, we were a staging ground for part of that 1962 business.

Q: Well, you say bad, what was the situation?

CLARK: Their demands for negotiation of a new treaty was their top priority. We took the position that that wasn't advisable, nor necessary nor did we want to. Riots took place and there was an atmosphere of real animosity over this issue. The Embassy took the position that we should negotiate and the Department was adamantly set against it. Of course that means that you are a heel not just to the Department but to the guys across the way in the military command over there too—Canal Command and the Southern Command.

Although I must say that there were some who were understanding but wouldn't put their neck out. It was really putting your neck out at that time to go on record saying that was the route we had to take or suffer the real consequences of a big confrontation.

That's why my second tour of duty there was not a very happy one as the first one had been.

Q: Did the Alliance for Progress, when the Kennedy Administration came in, help ease things? A show of more concern for Latin America.

CLARK: I will just speak for Panama. It really had nothing to do with it. The Canal was it, forget about the rest of it. They would use the Canal problem to fleece us out of more money and aid. That was the way to get at us.

Q: Was it that the Panamanians wanted to take over the Canal completely and run it or to reach some sort of compromise?

CLARK: Well, they wanted their sovereignty recognized which then would eventually lead to the end of the treaty at some particular point. That was the issue. The treaty said we had this strip, five miles wide as though we were sovereign, in perpetuity. They wanted the perpetuity clause out and they wanted their sovereignty. Of course, if they have sovereignty they have control of it.

Q: Even though the Embassy was making representations to Washington, I take it there was no move towards negotiations in those days?

CLARK: Well, they realized there was a big problem there and had been one for a long time. They sent a fellow down, a special assistant to Kennedy by the name of Kaison, a very smart cookie, to case the joint. This was before the upcoming visit of Panamanian President Chiari to Washington. Carl Kaison came down and I was selected to take care of him. I went around with him and made his appointments and got to know him. I never saw his report but there was no question about the fact that he came away with the conclusion that it had to be done. If not today, pretty soon tomorrow.

What Kennedy was afraid of, why Carl Kaison was sent down there, was that during this meeting that was what the President was going to ask for, the negotiation of a new treaty, and what was Kennedy going to say to avoid a real problem. So what happened was that when Chiari came up here it wasn't agreed to negotiate a new treaty but there were certain things set up...I forget the details...that would put it off for a while. It at least met a few of their demands.

That occurred in 1962 and I left at the end of the year. So we had gotten over that hurdle. But in January of 1964 the big explosion took place, the one that would have taken place during that meeting if some concessions had not been made and put it off for a while. That was the big uprising where we had to call up our soldiers and people got shot and all that jazz. But that is another story that involves me too.

Q: When was that? Was that later on?

CLARK: That was in January, 1964.

Q: How did that involve you?

CLARK: I was called back and made Director for Panama.

Q: You were supposed to go to Argentina?

CLARK: I did go.

Q: How long were you in Argentina?

CLARK: Only a year and four months.

Q: While you were in Panama, Joseph Farland was the Ambassador. How did he operate?

CLARK: Well, Joe Farland was a nice fellow who we got to know very well. We had children the same age as his children. He was a public relations fellow essentially. He was very good at it...making friends, going places, dancing the tamborito, and all that. To a large extent he left the real running of the Embassy pretty much to the DCM.

Q: With the Southern Command there did you find that the military was taking more of an active interest in what was going on in the continent as reflected...?

CLARK: Well, of course, they had their requirements for military aid to the continent. There wasn't any of that with Panama, so speaking from the point of view while I was in Panama I was aware of these other requirements that they had, but it was outside of our relationship.

Q: You went to Argentina at the end of 1962 for about a year?

CLARK: Yes, I went there in February 1963 and left in July of 1964.

Q: What were you doing there?

CLARK: I was political counselor.

Q: Your Ambassador was Robert McClintock, who is again one of the characters of the Foreign Service. Would you talk about him a bit?

CLARK: He was a wonderful fellow if he liked your style. If he didn't like your style you were out. He was smart as a whip. There were only two people that I have ever known who could sit down and dictate a ten page telegram or memo without pausing. He was one and the other was George Kennan. I happened to have had the very good fortune of being assigned to go around Latin America with Kennan in 1950. Just he and I. We spent three weeks together. Those two were brilliant people.

Q: Kennan was Policy Planning at that time.

CLARK: Just leaving.

Q: What was Kennan's reaction toward Latin America?

CLARK: He wrote, I think, maybe the best report on Latin America that has ever been written. It is unclassified now. What he said in that report was that this was a vibrant place with all kinds of problems, but the difference in outlook, the difference in values, the difference in their attitudes towards life are so different from ours that we have great difficulty understanding them. And people who serve in Latin America really have to build up a defensive mechanism of cynicism in order to survive, in order to do their job without getting buried. That was, I think, the message.

Q: With McClintock, first of all, what were the issues in Argentina that concerned us during this 1963-64 period?

CLARK: The usual one of military dictatorship versus democracy, elections.

Q: Who was the dictator there?

CLARK: General Aramburu, I think.

Q: It was post Peron?

CLARK: Oh, yes. We had an election there. Interestingly enough, the party that got elected was really a minor party but the Peronists didn't vote because they were protesting. So this minor party got elected and we in the political section happened to be the only ones that knew these guys. We and the consul in Cordoba, Bill Lehfeldt, were the only ones who had any contact with these people because they weren't expected to do anything. This put us in the political section in great shape because we knew everybody, including the president. Rob McClintock didn't get excited about that he just said, “Look, go on they

are yours. You find out about them and I will meet them later." So we had a heyday in that period of time before and quite a while after he was inaugurated.

That was one of the problems and the elections, of course, made us happy for a while.

Then another problem was military assistance. We had never had an agreement with them about it and they wanted some help so we had to have an agreement. Well, I got very much involved in that. We had some harrowing times negotiating that; contending with their extreme nationalistic attitudes. But eventually we got it signed, for good or bad. I never was sure whether it was a good or bad thing.

Apart from that I don't recall that there was anything very dramatic. Oh, yes there was. They expropriated the oil companies and Averell Harriman was sent down to take care of the situation because he used to play polo with some of the people in the Argentine. We had several meetings there with ministers. I remember one we had in the Embassy. Rob McClintock hosted a dinner and then we all sat around a big table. The Minister of Labor was there for some reason. He was a very talkative individual and made no sense. McClintock was translating back and forth. Finally Harriman said to McClintock, "Tell that man down there to shut up. I don't want to hear any more of his dribble." McClintock turns to him and translates, "The Ambassador says he appreciates very much the information you have given him, thank you very much."

This was just before they took over the oil companies. Harriman was sent down there to see that they didn't. He was en route home when they actually took it over and all hell broke loose.

To come back to McClintock's mind. The very next day he called in all the oil people and we met in his office. We had a discussion about what this all meant to them, to various relationships, etc. A two hour discussion. Then he pushed his bell and his secretary came in and sat down with her pad. He said, "I think we ought to get something off here." They were all sitting there. He dictated seven pages. He says to the assembled group, "Is there

anything in there that somebody would like to add to or change?" Quiet. Finally somebody said, "Mr. Ambassador I don't think we could have said it better ourselves." And off it went. It was a magnificent performance.

Q: Then you alluded to it, but how come you left?

CLARK: Well, this riot took place in Panama in January, 1964. That brought things to a real head. Tom Mann had just been moved over from the White House to be Assistant Secretary for Latin America, and he looks around for somebody to take over that job. Somebody suggested my name or he thought of me, but I got a telegram telling me to come immediately to Washington. I met with Tom. I didn't want to go back there, it was an awful job. It was something like that Guatemala job but much worse. During the conversation with Tom I told him I did not want the job. I knew all about it and it was the last job I wanted that I could think of. He said, "Well, I don't want this job either." So I said, "All right, if I have to do it, I have to do it, of course. But there is one thing you must know beforehand." He said, "What's that?" I said, "There is no other answer but to negotiate a new treaty and I can't operate in this job unless you feel the same way." He thought about it for a moment and then said, "Okay. How soon can you be back here?" So at least I got that much and that made it possible for me to work.

Q: How long were you doing that?

CLARK: Four years.

Q: This was during the Johnson Administration. What was the attitude of the Johnson Administration towards negotiating a treaty and how did you operate in this situation?

CLARK: Mr. Johnson didn't want trouble. I think just fundamentally everybody knew this had to be done and furthermore the Panama Canal was a wasting asset, not the strategic asset that it was when it was built. It was important but not vital. Furthermore the

importance was that it be open and operated properly and not that we necessarily do it. The question always was, well, could it be?

This was Johnson's biggest first international problem. He was inaugurated November, 1963 and January 9, 1964 here is this big uprising. His first problem in international affairs. His attitude was to do something.

I got there in July, 1964 and in December, if I remember correctly, we had arrived at the point where Mr. Johnson made a speech in which he said that we would begin negotiations of a new treaty. That took an awful lot of work and quite frankly when I got there in July I didn't believe this was going to happen at all, much less that it would happen in that time frame.

Then we began negotiations. Mr. Johnson became the real desk officer. I was working for him as assistant deputy. I remember going to a meeting one time of office directors and Carol Laise was heading up this meeting. The meeting was called for the purpose of exchanging views of how to get your problems over to the White House and some decisions made. I listened to this and said, “I think you could probably excuse me from this meeting. Mr. Johnson is the desk officer on Panama and I don't have any problems getting things over to the White House.” So I left the meeting.

Q: How did this work? What would he do?

CLARK: Well, he would call up Tom Mann and say, “What are we doing about so and so?” Tom would call me and say, “What are we doing about so and so?” Or Bill Bowdler or Bob Sayre, who were assistants over there in the White House would call. “The President wants to do something dramatic, what can we do?” He literally was on top of that situation all the time.

Q: In the four years, what were we doing? What progress was made?

CLARK: Well, we negotiated a new treaty. We had a negotiating team headed by Robert Anderson and Jack Erwin and Bob Woodward. I backstopped that, I wasn't on it. I thought it was better to keep operational things here and negotiations over there. We negotiated a new treaty. It was signed in principle by the two negotiating teams for referral to their separate governments for signature.

This leaked right away and the text got into the Chicago papers. All hell broke loose because it was like McCarthy and communism, if you negotiate the Panama Canal away you are a communist. We started to testify in the Congress. We were called there by the Armed Service Committee. Meanwhile the same thing was happening in Panama. Whether we would have gotten that treaty through our Congress, I don't know. But down there they didn't.

Q: That shoe dropped first.

CLARK: They got there first. So we were informed by the President of Panama that he couldn't sign it, political conditions prevented him from doing so.

Q: That sort of took you off the hook right away.

CLARK: It took us right off the hook, which was really a remarkable achievement. As you know there was a hiatus, this was in 1968, and then they began to talk about things again in the early 1970s. Nixon began to talk about taking it up again and eventually another treaty was negotiated, signed and ratified.

Q: Were those treaties in retrospect pretty similar?

CLARK: Yes. The same principle...recognize their sovereignty and then reserve certain powers for the operation of the Canal and the protection of the Canal.

Q: Then after this in 1968, what did you do?

CLARK: In 1968 I had a ruptured disc and had an operation. They didn't know exactly what to do with me for a while because there was a certain period of recuperation. They assigned me to the Senior Seminar at the Foreign Service Institute. I was there for a year.

Q: And then?

CLARK: Then I went to Peru.

Q: You were in Peru for how long?

CLARK: From 1969-73.

Q: You went as DCM. Who was the Ambassador?

CLARK: Taylor Belcher.

Q: He was a career officer. What was the situation in Peru in this particular period?

CLARK: Bad.

Q: One could use the same word today.

CLARK: Well, not as bad as it is today. A military government had taken over in 1968, just about a year before I got there. They had a program of radical reform that was very nationalistic. They wanted to have national companies rather than foreign companies. They put the pressure on all the foreign interests there—Grace and Company, Marcona Mines, the tuna industry and a variety of other manufacturers. This was very anti-foreign, particularly American. It was not personally so. Individually, including in the armed forces, who were running the whole thing, they were not antagonistic. In fact personally it was a very pleasant four years. Nonetheless, from an official point of view it was rough.

Again, what influences did we have to counter this nationalistic reform that benefited the people? Not much. We had an AID program and we kept it pretty much the way it was. We always hoped to be able to work something out that would be better. What happened is eventually it did work out that way. There was a global negotiated arrangement where the Peruvians took over and paid for all of the foreign assets there. Now the latter didn't get maybe what they wanted, but they got 75 cents on the dollar and they all left reasonably satisfied.

Unfortunately for Peru they don't know how to run those companies and things haven't been good for them. It took five years of that. This happened after I left, but the effort was being made all along to get them to discuss how they could take over the foreign companies.

Q: How was Ambassador Belcher in dealing with this situation?

CLARK: Excellent. He was an extrovert who got along with everybody, but particularly the military. He was always an outgoing fellow. They liked him. He was good with the jokes and very sound. A wonderful person to work with.

Q: You left there in 1973 and what did you do then?

CLARK: I retired.

Q: Enough was enough.

CLARK: Well, yes. I had three children in college and we hadn't had them with us for the last four years so I thought we should stay here. I could have had a job here but I didn't want the Department again and didn't want to go overseas, so I retired and did what I always liked to do anyway. That is to play golf.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much. I appreciate this.

CLARK: It has been kind of fun. I was wondering this morning if I would be able to remember anything?

Q: I think all of us can when we start walking our way through it.

CLARK: Yes, you remember a lot. A lot went through my mind when we were talking that I could have thrown in too but you can't go on and on.

End of interview